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From the April 11, 2003 print edition

Biz Buzz

The King of Torts

Timothy Roberts

James Boccardo was short, but the stories other lawyers tell about him make him appear larger than life.

A memorial service for the prominent San Jose lawyer is planned for April 12 in the old Bank of America building on Santa Clara Street, where he had once practiced law. Mr. Boccardo died March 17. He was 91 years old.

Mr. Boccardo got an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering at San Jose State University before getting his law degree from Stanford University. He put his scientific knowledge to work in the courtroom, pioneering the use of demonstrative evidence, showing a jury how a product worked -- or failed to.

He was profiled in Time and Forbes magazines. He brought a successful libel case against the old Look magazine on behalf of San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto. In 1962 Mr. Boccardo built the 10-story General Telephone Building at St. John and Market streets, and later another tower next door.

Mr. Boccardo was mercurial, well-dressed and lived well. He had homes in Los Gatos, Palm Springs and Pebble Beach. In one story, he and flamboyant San Francisco attorney Melvin Belli drove down the Spanish Steps in Rome in a rented Rolls-Royce.

Attorney Fernando Zazueta remembers Mr. Boccardo from his time with the Boccardo law firm.

"He had a neat, trimmed mustache," Mr. Zazueta says. "He was avuncular. The partners called him Papa. ... Mel Belli got all the press, but Boccardo was the best."

Gloom, doom and a hint of boom

The news was quite gloomy at the economic summit held jointly by the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group and U.S. Rep. Mike Honda April 7.

Mr. Honda expressed concerns about a ballooning federal deficit. Bill Coleman, founder and chief customer advocate of BEA Systems Inc., warned of a shift of jobs to Asia when the nano-biotechnology boom begins. Steve Adachi, IT manager for Global Commerce Technology at Cisco Systems Inc., warned that valley companies won't be able to hire the best and the brightest if they are restricted in offering stock options. Linda Gold, president and CEO of M3i Works in San Jose, cautioned that workers' compensation and health insurance costs were "out of control."

The only bright news was word from host Comcast Cable that it plans to open a call center employing 400 people in the South Bay later this year, and it would invest \$200 million in its technology over the next two years.

"We're glad to be part of the recovery," said Scott Binder, Comcast regional senior vice president.

The little building that could

Eight years ago the city of Morgan Hill erected a 300-square-foot building at its Caltrain stop at a cost of \$200,000. The idea was to find a very small restaurant to fill this expensive little building. (The cost per square foot is a little deceiving. There is a fair amount of related outdoor space not included in the square footage. Also, the state Transportation Commission paid half the cost.) It's a wood-frame building with large windows that can open to serve customers standing outside. The only catch was the need for a safe way to get people across the tracks to the little building.

Finally, after negotiations first with Southern Pacific and then Union Pacific, the people-crossing is under construction and Morgan Hill is deciding who should occupy the little depot.

There were two bidders: Ya Bon, a New Orleans-style eatery, and House of Bagels. Joyce Maskell, the project manager for Morgan Hill's Business Assistance and Housing Services, says her department is recommending Ya Bon. The Morgan Hill City Council makes the final decision, probably on April 16.

A certain style

Pierre Omidyar, founder and chairman of the board of San Jose-based eBay Inc., will be honored by San Francisco's Exploratorium April 30 for his leadership in business, technology and philanthropy. The company he founded has been wildly successful, surprising because it was founded not so much as a business but as a service to connect people who had something to sell or trade.

The online service has 62 million registered users, according to its most recent annual report.

It isn't the first time that the museum has honored someone from the business world. David Packard and William Hewlett, who founded a company of their own, were honored earlier in the 26-year history of the awards.

But Mr. Omidyar is being honored as much for his non-business start as for his business success.

"I was totally amazed by his way of thinking," says Goéry Delacôte, the museum's executive director. "Businesses have to be successful in a traditional business sense, but there is a style to some of them. A lot of things have happened in Silicon Valley because of a certain style."

Feinstein, Lofgren, Beall and BART

U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., plans what she is billing as a major policy speech at a Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group event at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose April 22. No word yet on what the policy is. ... U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-San Jose, became the first member of Congress to endorse Howard Dean, the former governor of Vermont, in his run for president. ... County Supervisor Jim Beall puts the blame for the fiscal woes of the Valley Transportation Authority squarely on the shoulders of -- the VTA. Speaking at the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce Morning Buzz meeting on April 8, he said, "They overspent. They spent their reserves. All the things you aren't supposed to do." The VTA had no comment. ... Meanwhile in Washington, D.C., San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales and manufacturing group President and CEO Carl Guardino were lobbying Congress for \$494 million for the BART extension to San Jose. The taxpayers of Santa Clara and Alameda counties are paying for the bulk of the project <http://sanjose.bizjournals.com/sanjose/stories/2003/04/14/tidbits1.html?t=printable>

themselves but still need money from the state and the feds to complete the \$3.8 billion project. Their goal is to get the project written into the big transportation bill that Congress will approve later this year or early next. What they heard from the California delegation: "Keep employers engaged," Mr. Guardino said from a D.C. phone booth. "It impresses members (of Congress) that employers care about transportation."

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